

Caring for the Affairs of Jugo-Slavia

By AARON HARDY ULM

WHAT has become of Serbia? Why, now that peace prevails, do we hear so little of the people whose misfortunes precipitated the World War in August, 1914? Those questions are probably idle, mayhap foolish, ones to persons who keep up with the details of international affairs. But no doubt there are many who have only a vague notion as to what has happened to the small Balkan state that big Austria wanted to destroy, Russia wanted to save, thus giving Germany the pretext for marching on Belgium to attack France, Russia's ally, bringing Great Britain and finally most of the world into the fray.

When steps were taken to get into touch with Serbia's diplomatic spokesmen in Washington, it was discovered that there is no longer a mere Serbian legation at the national capital but, instead, a legation of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In common phraseology Serbia has all but disappeared and in its place has come Jugo-Slavia, Yugo-Slavia or Yougo-Slavia, depending on which term seems best to you. All are used with authority but the second conforms best to correct pronunciation, though the first is used most in this country. In none of its forms is the term official. Instead the strictly proper name of the country that was Serbia, being now much more than what was little Serbia, is the kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Prior to the peace that ended the Great War it was merely the kingdom of the Serbs, who have always insisted on designating themselves as a people rather than as a country.

The obscure legation that used to get along in Washington with one or two secretaries and clerks now is one of the largest in the national capital. The country of 2,500,000 population it used to represent has grown to be one of more than 10,000,000 people. It is a very busy legation, too, for old Serbia had virtually no consulates in this country and the new government has been able as yet to establish only a few. Under the old régime about all they had in the way of a consular service was an honorary consul-general in New York. The designee was a professor in Columbia University.

Little Serbia as of old had very little dealings, commercial or otherwise, with the United States. Comparatively few of the immigrants to this country came from there. It is estimated that there are not more than 40,000 persons of stock belonging to what was Serbia before the war in this country. However, there are or lately were nearly a million persons in America belonging racially to Serbian or closely kindred stock. They came from territory adjoining Serbia that belonged to the old Austrian-Hungarian empire, territory that now in the main is included within the country that was Serbia. Chiefly they are Slovenes and Croats, with many actual Serbs who came from Herzegovina and Bosnia, the two Austrian provinces that lay at the basis of Austria's attack on Serbia. It was a Serbian who in Sarajevo, the capital of Herzegovina, shot the Austrian crown prince and thus supplied the pretext for the demands Austria made of Serbia and in the making started the Great War.

Both Herzegovina and Bosnia are now parts of Serbia. While most of their population is Serbian, the two provinces give much contrast and some complication to the new kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Though they are on the Adriatic and about a thousand miles from Constantinople, only about a half century has passed since they were wrested from the rulership of Turkey which held them in subjection for many centuries. In fact, only about fifteen years' time has passed since nominal Turkish rule was supplanted by full annexation to Austria. Some Moslems still help make up the population of the two provinces. A large proportion of the native Slavs are Mohammedans as the result of former Turkish domination.

The population of the enlarged kingdom is on the whole homogeneous, its representatives in America say. Ninety per cent or more are Slavs and Slavs of like history, traditions, language and in the main customs. Hence they are called Jugo- or Yugo-Slavs, which means Southern Slavs. Therefore, the term Serbian has been absorbed very largely by the more embracing one, Jugo-Slavian.

It is stated that the language of all the Southern Slavs is the same, differing only to the extent of varying spoken dialects. In the old Austrian-Hungarian provinces the Latin alphabet is used; in Serbia they cling to the Cyrillic or Russian alphabet. The latter has 32 letters devised specially for the peculiarities of the Slav languages. The Latin has only 26 letters. The difference in alphabets brings unique rather than serious complication, for most of the people are famil-

iar with both. But there are other differences which complicate the affairs of what was perhaps under the old order the most homogeneous country in the world. The distinction of old Serbia was that it was a "peasant kingdom." There was no nobility, recognized or understood. There were virtually no classes—only one, the peasants. Even the royal family is of peasant stock, the grandfather of the present king having been a herder of goats.

Agriculture was almost the sole industry and it was carried on by very primitive methods. The rich soil, however, rendered the people so comfortable that Serbia used to be called "the poor man's paradise."

The added provinces are different. Long foreign rule developed big landed estates, a strong middle class, a nobility and a complicated life in general. The Slovenes and the Croats are better educated than the Serbs and know more about the world and affairs in general. They are inclined somewhat to look down on the Serbs as crude and ignorant peasants who are beneath them.

There is an inevitable struggle on over which of the different peoples shall dominate the new kingdom. The Serbs with an independent government long established and with high repute among the nations naturally expect to be the center around which the new kingdom will revolve. They favor a centralized government, in which all the different provinces will have due share in its operation. The Slovenes and the Croats rather favor a federated government, with each province running its main affairs to suit itself. The question is soon to be decided in an election of a constituent assembly which is to draw up a new constitution for the kingdom.

The enlarged kingdom has its full share of internal politics but its representatives say none of the problems forebode serious trouble. There is a large Socialist party, especially in the old Austrian-Hungarian provinces, but there is no serious opposition to the monarchy, which because of King Peter's heroic part in the war, as well as the prince regent's personal standing, is very popular.

"We have nothing to fear from the monarchy," said a leading Serbian. "It is without actual authority and there is no nobility or privileged classes to support it were it to become autocratic. In essence Serbia has long had a democratic government, ruled by a popular parliament patterned much after the English system. Even the humblest peasant doesn't hesitate to approach and talk freely with the king and even to tell him how the state should be run."

There is some Bolshevik sentiment, as in all Europe, among the peoples of the new Serbian kingdom. It is not of threatening importance, say legation attaches, despite the fact that the municipal elections in Belgrade, the capital, were carried recently by a group whose principles are tantamount to Bolshevism. They were not allowed to take control, however, as the conservatives claim the victory was won by a fluke.

They have their external troubles like all the other new countries, of which it substantially is one. The Magyars of Hungary take a belligerent attitude toward all its neighboring Balkan states, except Austria, which is helpless. Because of them and the Italians, the Jugo-Slavs, Czechoslovaks and the Rumanians have

formed a self-protective alliance. Differences between the Jugo-Slavs and Italy over Dalmatia and Fiume seem to have been settled, without the concurrence, apparently, of D'Annunzio, the spectacular "fly in the ointment" who holds on at Fiume and insists that it shall be Italian territory instead of a free city as decreed by the Peace Conference.

"The D'Annunzio problem will take care of itself," said a Serb who spoke authoritatively. "Of course, if it comes to the point that he must be put out and the Jugo-Slavs are told to do the job we will have him out of Fiume in twenty-four hours."

D'Annunzio and other external problems have continued the war, in a preparatory sense, for the Serbians, a war that has been on continually since 1912. The Balkan-Turkish war, followed by that with Bulgaria over the spoils, had been scarcely closed when the Great War caused Serbia to be swept away as perhaps no other country was ever before swept away by an invading force. They still feel impelled to maintain a standing army of a quarter of a million men.

But despite the long period of severe travail, actual conditions are not nearly so bad as you might imagine.

"Six months after the armistice, Jugo-Slavia had fifty million tons of grain for export," says Captain Gordon-Gordon Smith, an authority on that land and a member of its Washington diplomatic establishment. "This in face of the fact that a year before the armistice virtually the entire Serbian population had been forced into the mountains of Albania. Their farm implements, such as they had, had been destroyed, cattle and other domestic animals slain, thousands of houses burned, the railroads rendered useless—the country crushed as few countries have ever been crushed."

Serbia's comeback in the matter of food production was due largely to the primitive methods employed in tilling the soil. The farmers knew how to get along without the kind of plows that come from factories and even without oxen, the country's chief source of hauling power, to pull them. Most of the farms had been operated for ages on the community, co-operative basis, and the owners were able by joint effort to overcome many of the disadvantages that faced them on return to their homes.

The legation states that Jugo-Slavia will have 250,000,000 tons of surplus grain for export this year. It is difficult to move it, even to Austria where it is vitally needed to stave off actual starvation, because of the condition of the roadways and the railways.

The railways are being put into operating condition, trains are now moving regularly along the main lines.

"Belgrade will be the great railroad center of Eastern Europe," said a member of the Washington legation staff. "From it will radiate great continental trunk lines connecting all Europe; Paris with Saloniki, Constantinople and even Odessa, and St. Petersburg and Berlin with the Eastern Mediterranean. It will be the main connecting link some day in a rail line from London to India."

"Jugo-Slavia needs American farm tractors and automobile trucks and automobiles and farm implements and railway equipment. For those things we present an almost unlimited market. It is stagnant now because of the currency situation."

When the Germans were forced out of Serbia and the Austrians and Hungarians let go the other provinces now attached to that kingdom, a flood of paper money was left behind. It couldn't be outlawed. It has been taken up and supplanted by other paper money, which, like the currency of all the new and reinstated countries of Europe, has an exchange value far below par. Where the chief currency unit of Serbia used to be worth twenty cents in American gold it is now worth only three cents. Being an agricultural country, Jugo-Slavia has little in the way of exports we need to exchange for American goods; hence very little commerce is going on between the two countries.

"While we need much in the way of American manufactures we need most of all American brains and industrial enterprise. In natural resources Jugo-Slavia is the richest country for its size in the world. We have iron and coal and all the important minerals in abundance. The

deposits haven't been scratched. Our timber resources are immense and have been employed scarcely at all except for firewood. There is no more promising place in the world for the kind of lumber operators you have developed in this country. The government controls most of the forests and all the minerals and would gladly grant valuable concessions to bring about their development. Recently one of your consuls in Greece

(Concluded on page 14)



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